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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TIRANA 000286

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: DAS JONES MEETINGS IN TIRANA MAY 7-8, 2009

Classified By: DCM Stephen Cristina for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. On May 7-8, EUR DAS Stuart Jones came to Tirana to participate in the Adriatic Charter Ministerial Conference. On the side, he conducted meetings with Albanian officials. These meetings largely focused on preparations for the June 28 national elections and the current dispute between the Government of Albania (GOA) and OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), centered on ODIHR's selection of Dame Audrey Glover to head its observation mission for Albania's elections. The GOA has strongly objected to Glover's appointment. DAS Jones also discussed Kosovo, the current GOA tender for medium-lift helicopters, and our concerns with the head prosecutor in Durres. End Summary.

ADRIATIC CHARTER CONFERENCE

12. (U) The conference consisted of a working breakfast, a one-hour session, and a working lunch. Given the short duration of the actual conference session, participants limited themselves to congratulatory remarks and general support for the expansion of the Charter. All participants expressed their hope that someday the A-5 would be the A-7, to include Kosovo and Serbia. NAQQ QQ ` Hoop Scheffer gave an oia and Croatia a`ave a concluding speech parliamentary elections will be free and fair. He expressed his full confidence that all voters who need an ID card in order to vote will get one prior to the elections.

14. (C) Turning to the subject of the Audrey Glover as Head of ODIHR's Election Observation Mission, Berisha argued vociferously against ODIHR's appointment of Glover, claiming that Glover is biased and will not give Albania a fair hearing in any ODIHR election assessment. Berisha expressed particular anger at Glover's arrival in Tirana, despite the fact that the GOA had called her appointment "unacceptable" in a letter to ODIHR shortly before Dame Glover's arrival in Tirana. (Glover arrived in Tirana May 6, just one day before DAS Jones). Berisha told DAS Jones that although the GOA will cooperate with ODIHR, "we will not cooperate with her (Glover) at all." DAS Jones urged the GOA to accept Glover as the head of the observation mission, stressing Glover's professionalism and underlining ODIHR's precedent of never giving countries the right to veto a head of mission. Jones said that Europeans would not understand Berisha's position especially in light of NATO Membership and Albania's desire to chair the OSCE in 2012. And we wouldn't either. How, Jones added, did Berisha plan to explain himself to the Europeans? Berisha paused and said "I am a simple man. I can only tell them the truth and hope they will understand." Berisha angrily denounced Glover's performance in the 1996 elections, pointing out her failure to criticize the opposition Socialist Party (SP) for its boycott of the 1996 elections.

15. (C) In a separate meeting, Foreign Minister Basha echoed verbatim Berisha's objections, claiming that Glover would not

offer an unbiased evaluation because of her history with Albania. In a later dinner with DAS Jones, Basha reported on a meeting he had held earlier in the day with all European Ambassadors to explain the GOA objections to Glover. He noted that the Ambassadors' concerns focused mainly on the precedent it would set with countries like Russia. When Jones warned that the GOA was making it look like a personal dispute, Basha admitted that it was personal. Indeed, Berisha in his anger had even instructed Basha to tell his foreign counterparts that it was personal.

¶6. (C) Basha admitted that no matter what the outcome, the situation was lose-lose for the Government, and for that reason, it has been keeping the issue quiet and out of the media. Indeed, Minister of Interior Nishani, present at the dinner, was unaware of Dame Glover, and to date, there has only been a few cursory articles announcing Glover's arrival, but not discussing the dispute at all. Jones noted that there will be several tripwires which the GOA should consider carefully - whether Glover will be allowed to meet the Central Election Committee, whether she would meet the

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Ministry of the Interior and get its full cooperation, and if she meets with opposition leader Edi Rama, but not with anyone from the ruling party. In a show of support, Jones and Ambassador Withers also met openly with Glover for coffee at one of the largest hotels.

¶7. (U) Note. On May 13, the story came out in the press, including the fact that the Central Election Commission has refused to meet with Glover. Media reports that an unnamed EU official allegedly responded, "If the position of Albanian authorities does not change, then there will be other official actions by the US as happened in the case of the lustration law." End Note.

EDI RAMA: BERISHA HAS HURT ALBANIA

¶8. (SBU) Tirana Mayor and opposition leader Edi Rama shared with Jones his views on the upcoming elections. He thanked Ambassador Withers for his help in resolving the dispute over ID cards, although he noted that adequate distribution of the cards will still be a problem. According to Rama, out of 730,000 citizens without passports, there are still 400,000 without IDs and less than two months until the elections. Rama stressed that a delay of the elections would be in no one's interest and claimed that his party (SP) has been organizing groups to get people to register, including providing busses to application centers.

¶9. (SBU) When asked about SP's chances in the upcoming elections, Rama noted that although the DP claims to have "saved" Albania, it has actually imperiled it by deepening corruption and by allowing the construction of "dirty" factories that are polluting the environment. He claimed that Albanians want to get rid of Berisha. The economy is hurting average citizens due to the drop in remittances. Citizens are also unhappy that the high interest rate on the new loan to finance the budget deficit will raise the cost of the already scandalously expensive Durres-Kukes road to over 1.5 billion euro. When asked about Zogby International's recent polls putting DP slightly ahead of SP, Rama angrily answered that Zogby is biased, and that SP internal polling shows the SP winning a majority of seats.

PROMOTING STABILITY IN THE BALKANS

¶10. (C) DAS Jones also discussed regional affairs with President Topi, PM Berisha and FM Basha. Topi noted several recent meetings with his regional counterparts to demonstrate Albania's efforts to promote stability and improve relations through dialog. Berisha stated that poor Serbian-Kosovar relations undermined regional stability and that the Albanian

government was working hard to promote a more positive approach to the conflict. Basha shared his efforts to convince governments to recognize Kosovo's independence. When asked his opinion, Basha stated that he saw South Africa as the key to winning more African recognitions. He implied that he had contacts close to the new South African President Zuma who may be able to win Zuma over to recognition. He also underlined the importance of recognition from Pakistan. Basha shared his recent efforts to win over Libyan President Qaddafi, but said that Qaddafi was still noncommittal. Basha felt that the next step for Kosovo after winning IMF membership would be membership in the Council of Europe, where he felt Kosovo had enough votes in their favor. Lastly, Basha complained that the Kosovar FM is not nearly active enough in seeking his own country's recognitions.

SIKORSKY HELICOPTER BID

¶11. (SBU) In meetings with Berisha and Defense Minister Oketa, Jones and Ambassador Withers also inquired about the Ministry of Defense's current bid for medium-lift helicopters. Sikorsky is offering its Blackhawk and has advocacy rights. Also competing are the EU's Eurocopter and Italy's Augusta-Westland. Berisha assured him that the procurement process will be "fully transparent and fair," but that competing Augusta and Eurocopter helicopters were competitive with Sikorsky, which he found expensive.

¶12. (SBU) For his part, Oketa reported that the MoD commission reviewing the tender has returned with several follow-up questions for the bidders. Oketa has also requested the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) to send an expert to provide an unbiased assessment, a request to which NAMSA has responded positively. The MoD will wait to make a decision until after these two additional steps are taken.

TROUBLES WITH THE DURRES PROSECUTOR

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¶13. (SBU) Jones also discussed judicial issues with President Topi and with the Prosecutor General Ina Rama. Topi thanked the U.S., especially Ambassador Withers, for showing strong support for the judiciary's independence. (Note. Although from the same party as Prime Minister Berisha, Topi and his followers in the Democratic Party (DP) have clashed with Berisha and his supporters, especially over the independence of the judiciary, over which Topi has responsibility. End Note.)

¶14. (C) The Ambassador also raised with Topi and PG Rama our concerns about the continued presence of Arjan Ndoja as head of the Durres Prosecutor's office (see ref). Topi and Rama agreed to assess the situation and discuss with each other a resolution.

¶15. (U) This cable has been cleared by DAS Jones.
CRISTINA